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WILDLIFE SERVICES—SOUTH CAROLINA

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USDA Resolves Wildlife Conflicts in South Carolina

Every day, residents, industries, organizations and agencies call on South Carolina Wildlife Services (WS) for help in protecting agriculture, human health and safety, natural resources, and property from damage or threats posed by wildlife. Managed by professional wildlife biologist, WS responds with effective, selective, and humane strategies to resolve wildlife conflicts. WS biologists address serious beaver damage to South Carolina's transportation infrastructure, crops, timber, and natural resources. In addition, WS protects pilots, air passengers, and aircraft from dangerous wildlife collisions with airplanes at civilian airports and military installations; protects endangered loggerhead turtles from predation; and managed damage caused by pigeons, starlings, Canada geese, white-tailed deer, and other wildlife.

Applying Science & Expertise to Wildlife Challenges

WS offers information, advice, equipment, and materials that enable many people to resolve wildlife conflicts on their own. Often, this *technical assistance* can be provided over the phone. WS also provides on-site expertise, or *direct assistance*, to manage complex wildlife problems that cannot be safely resolved by others. To support this effort, WS conducts *scientific research* across the Nation to develop answers to new problems posed by wildlife and to ensure the program benefits from the latest science and technology.

While WS conducts a wide range of operational and research activities, a few in-depth examples are provided to highlight WS' role in protecting air



travel, preventing beaver damage, and providing assistance with urban white-tailed deer management.

Protecting Transportation, Timber, Crops, and Natural Resources—

WS provides direct assistance in multiple South Carolina counties to remove beavers that cause flooding in timber lands, crop lands, and on roadways. By managing beaver damage, WS saves several million dollars annually in South Carolina resources. These "savings" are measured mostly in terms of losses avoided as a result of managing the damage.

WS provides training to the public for integrated beaver management by participating in workshops around the State and by working with the public on an individual basis.

WS' National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC) works to identify new technology to manage beaver damage. Nonlethal damage management methods such as pond levelers and exclusionary devices have been evaluated. Other research includes modifying current equipment so that it is selective as possible. Greater equipment selectivity reduces the number of times that animals, other than beavers, are impacted by these devices. An otter-proof trigger is an example of these modifications. The trigger allows otters to pass through beaver traps unharmed. Additionally, South Carolina WS is assisting in a study investigating productivity and reproductive success of beavers in the Southeastern United States.

Protecting Human Health and Safety at Airports—WS is recognized nationally and internationally for its scientific expertise in reducing wildlife hazards to the aviation industry. NWRC conducts research to understand the nature of wildlife hazards at airports, develop management tools to reduce these hazards, and provide airport personnel with information to control hazards.

Top 5 Major Assistance Activities:

- Protecting transportation infrastructure from beaver damage
- Protecting timber, crops, natural resources, levees, and damage from beaver damage
- Protecting public safety, aircraft, and military operations from wildlife hazards at airports
- Managing problems caused by urban white-tailed deer
- Managing damage caused by migratory birds (i.e., Canada geese and vultures)

Top 5 WS Research Projects of Interest to South Carolina:

- Productivity and reproductive success of beavers in the Southeastern United States
- Defining and reducing wildlife hazards to aviation
- Managing problems caused by vultures
- Managing bird predation to aquaculture and sport fisheries
- Evaluating and monitoring wildlife diseases and parasites such as West Nile virus, canine distemper, leptospirosis, and rabies

WS provides direct and technical assistance to several Department of Defense facilities and civilian airports throughout the state. Technical assistance to airports includes initial consultations, the development of wildlife hazard assessments and wildlife hazard management plans, and the training of airport personnel to reduce the risk of wildlife collisions with aircraft. Direct assistance projects involve the management of animals hazardous to aircraft operations at the site. All of these efforts serve to reduce the potential costs and danger associated with wildlife strikes.

Protecting Natural Resources—South Carolina's barrier islands provide valuable habitat for the federally threatened loggerhead sea turtle. The Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge has one of the highest density nesting areas for the northern sub-population of loggerhead sea turtles. Erosion and heavy predation from raccoons have significantly decreased the hatch success of the nests laid. WS works cooperatively with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to protect loggerhead sea turtle which is an integral part of the recovery of the northern sub-population

Addressing Property Damage Caused by Roosting Vultures—Black vultures and turkey vultures congregate in large roosts that often contain hundreds of birds. Vulture problems are one of the leading wildlife complaints received by the South Carolina WS because their roosts are frequently located in residential areas. The accumulation of droppings on homes, vehicles, and boats is a health concern to residents. Property damage to shingles, boat covers, and awnings from homes and businesses is also common. South Carolina WS assists towns and the communication industry by dispersing roosts and helping local officials obtain Federal and State permits to remove vultures in an effort to reinforce harassment programs. WS also provides bird scaring equipment and technical assistance.

Urban White-tailed Deer Management—As people have developed rural areas, conflicts with white-tailed deer have increased dramatically. Urban sprawl combined with the adaptability of deer, have created conflicts that pose significant challenges. Urban forests and parks provide a sanctuary for deer populations that then move into surrounding neighborhoods. While deer are a very charismatic species and are often held as symbols of harmony with nature, it doesn't take long before residents directly experience the reality of deer overpopulation. The public is concerned because deer destroy residential landscaping, increase the risk of deer/vehicle accidents, and increase the threat of tick-borne diseases being transmitted to pets and people. WS works with communities experiencing deer conflicts to provide residents with information on urban deer management. Recommendations are tailored to meet the concerns of the community.

Urban Canada Geese Management—Resident Canada geese problems continue to increase in the State. Concerns include the accumulation of droppings on turf, water quality, and aggressive geese that nest around buildings. In addition, golf courses parks, and other recreational areas experience extensive damage to turf, fair-ways, and greens from feeding

Major Cooperators

- Clemson University
- Columbia Metropolitan Airport
- Hilton Head Island Airport
- Horry County Stormwater Department
- Marine Corps Air Station-Beaufort
- South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control
- South Carolina Department of Natural Resources
- South Carolina Department of Transportation
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

birds. WS biologists provide help to the public through direct assistance and one-on-one advice. WS captures birds which are then donated to local food banks.

Looking to the Future

WS provides the citizens of South Carolina with safe, effective, and humane assistance for a diverse range of wildlife conflicts, but the need for support is on-going.

The demand for beaver management continues to increase, and while the desire to provide services to those in need is great, some counties cannot afford to enter into a cooperative agreement with WS to secure beaver management assistance.

The vulture population in the southeastern United States has risen dramatically as well in recent years. This increase has resulted in a sharp rise in the number of requests for assistance that WS receives. Additionally, requests for airport assistances have increased in recent years. A trained airport biologist/bird biologist is needed so that WS can respond effectively to these issues.

South Carolina Wildlife Services Funding

In addition to receiving federally allocated funds, WS also receives money from cooperators; such as producers; private individuals; businesses; and other Federal, State, and Local government agencies who have a vested interest in the program. In most cases, these cooperators need help to resolve wildlife damage problems or they play a role in wildlife damage management.

